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ABSTRACT

Mexican American (MA) students remain at-risk for not completing high school. Since previous research has shown that parental involvement can positively influence MA students' academic achievement, the effects that parental involvement during students' eighth grade year has on students' school attendance in tenth grade are examined. Researchers drew on a national sample of MA students (N=1,714) and their parents. A theoretical model was developed to guide this research. The findings indicate that eighth grade MA students whose parents are involved in discussing school activities, whose educational aspirations for their children are high, and who have previously done well in school are not likely to drop out of school by tenth grade. However, male students may stay in school longer than female students, even though females may experience more parental involvement, and may do better in school than males. Significant differences were also found based on students' gender, the parents' English language proficiency, and the parents' birth place. Students of emigrant parents performed better in school and were more likely to still be in school in the tenth grade than students whose parents were born in the United States. (Contains 21 references.) (RJM)

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Abstract

Mexican-American (MA) students remain at-risk for not completing high school. Previous research has demonstrated that parental involvement can positively influence MA students academic achievement (Keith & Lichtman, 1994). Can parental involvement in eighth grade effect drop out status in tenth grade? This research investigates the influence that parental involvement in eighth grade has on students' school attendance in tenth grade. Using structural equations analysis (AMOS; Arbuckle, 1995), results suggest that eighth grade students ($N = 1,714$) whose parents communicate about school activities, have high educational aspirations for their children, and who are doing well in school are likely to remain in school through tenth grade. Significant differences were also found based on the students gender, the parents English language proficiency, and the parents birth place.

What is the Influence of Mexican-American Parental Involvement on School Attendance Patterns?

In spite of the fact that the school attendance patterns of Mexican-American (MA) students have been documented for three decades by The United States Department of Education and a plethora of intervention and educational programs have been attempted, MA children are still at significant risk for not completing high school (NCES, 93-292). Without a high school diploma, these early school leavers are often viewed as handicapped or failures of the educational school system. Their leaving school is a conspicuous event that is perhaps the result of a chain of circumstances that has begun years before (Finn, 1989).

Previous research on student dropouts has considered student background characteristics (i.e. SES, race, achievement), nonattendance and disruptive behavior (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986), delinquency (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984), poor academic performance (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985), alienation (Seeman, 1975), undiagnosed learning disability (Berstein & Rulo, 1976), native language other than English (Steinberg et al., 1984) and marginal high school involvement (Wehlage, 1983) as factors that influence students' school attendance. Furthermore, "aspiration-opportunity disjunction" may also significantly influence students from low SES backgrounds (Elliott, Voss, & Wendling, 1966), along with their academic self-concept (Byrne, 1984).

Limited research is available about possible causal factors that influence MA students to stay in school or leave school early (e.g., Alva, 1991; Buenning & Tollefson, 1987; Fernandez & Velez, 1989). Some researchers have investigated models of school learning with Hispanic students (Hernandez-Gantes & Keith, 1995), Hispanic students who have done extremely well in school (Gandara, 1982), and female Hispanics who have received terminal degrees (Simoniello, 1981). Other researchers have focused on how parental involvement influences MA academic achievement (Keith & Lichtman, 1994), and how Hispanic families socialize their children to education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). But research is still needed to understand possible causal influences for MA dropout and achievement patterns.

The search for causes of MA dropout behavior appear to focus on socioeconomic, physical, psychological, and cultural influences as possible causal factors (Buenning & Tollefson, 1987). These causal factors have often been associated with the Mexican-American community, the school, and an interaction between home and school (Carter & Segura, 1979). Since research has demonstrated parental involvement is one variable known to positively influence the academic achievement of eighth

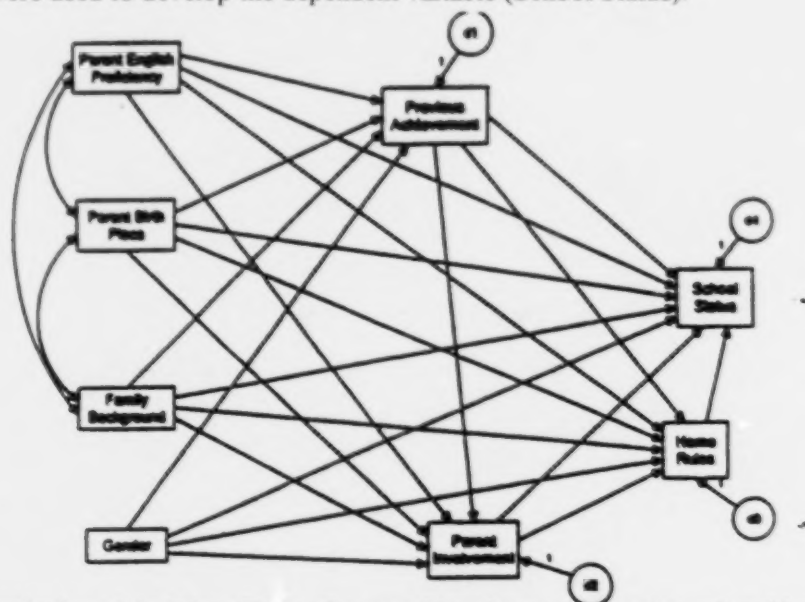
grade students (Keith & Lichtman, 1994), perhaps this manipulable variable may directly or indirectly affect tenth grade school attendance of MA students.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence that parental involvement in eighth grade has on student attendance (school status) in tenth grade, while controlling for critical background influences (e.g. eighth grade achievement, home rules, parents English language proficiency, parents birth place, family background, and gender).

Method

This research is a longitudinal investigation which uses a national sample of MA students ($N = 1,714$) and their parents, who completed the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS) and academic achievement tests in eighth grade, and who also completed the First-follow up survey of 1990 in tenth grade. NELS is the third in a series of longitudinal extant data sets developed and maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

A theoretical model, based on previous research, theory, and logic was developed to guide this research (see model 1). Items from the 1988 NELS surveys were used to develop background variables (Parent English Proficiency, Parent Birth Place, Gender, and Family Background) and intervening variables (Eighth Grade Achievement, Parental Involvement, and Family Rules). Items from the 1990 NELS survey were used to develop the dependent variable (School Status).

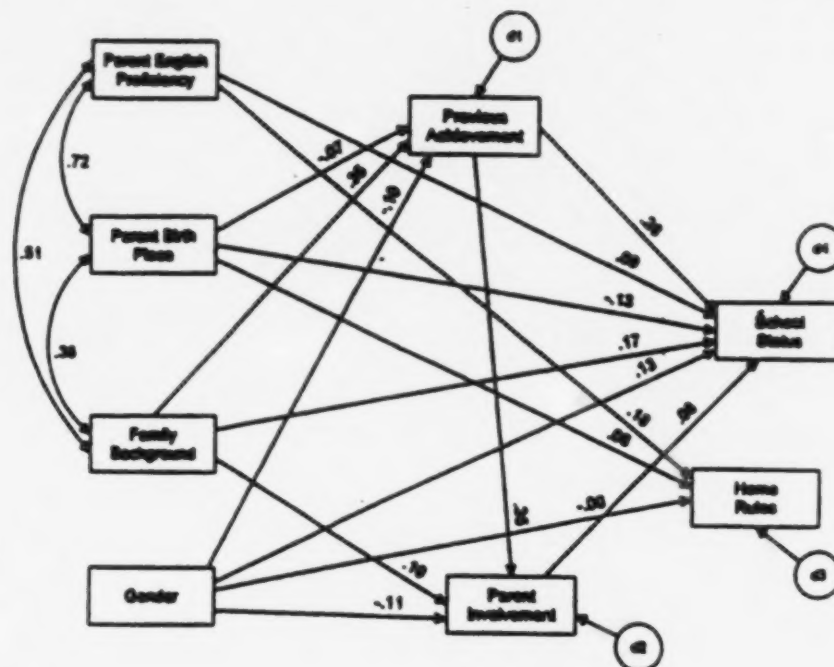


Model 1. Theoretical model of the effects of parental involvement, eighth grade achievement, home rules, parents English language proficiency, parent birth place, family background and gender on school status of tenth grade Mexican-American students.

Latent variable structural equations analysis, using Amos (Analysis of Moment Structures; Arbuckle, 1995, 1992), was done to analyze the data. Amos is a statistical program similar to LISREL and EQS, which performs latent variable structural equations analysis along with confirmatory factor and path analysis. Descriptive statistics were also calculated. Results were weighted in order to reflect an equal percentage of students in and out of school of the total sample size ($N=1,357$) for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

The estimated model illustrating the effects of parental involvement and other variables on school status is shown in Figure 2. The numbers found on the model are path coefficients and were interpreted as meaningful if they were statistically significant (i.e., a probability of less than .05) and if they were equal to or greater than .05 (Pedhazur, 1982, chap 15). Any path coefficient that did not meet these two requirements for meaningfulness was dropped from the model. Because insignificant paths were dropped from the model, figure 2 contains fewer causal arrows than are found in Model 1



Model 2. Effects of parental involvement, eighth grade achievement, home rules, parents English language proficiency, parent birth place, family background and gender on school status of tenth grade Mexican-American students.

Research results suggest that parental involvement in eighth grade does significantly influence school attendance in tenth grade ($\beta = .08$). Parents who are involved in discussing school activities and who have high educational aspirations for their children are more likely to have children who are still in school in tenth grade. Additionally, a number of background influences were shown to influence school attendance. Parents who are proficient in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing English are more likely to have their children still in school ($\beta = .09$). As Family Background increases (parents level of education and occupational status) children tend to stay in school ($\beta = .17$). Interestingly, students whose parents were born outside of the United States may stay in school longer than those whose parents were born here ($\beta = .13$) and appear to do better in school ($\beta = -.07$). Furthermore, males appear to stay in school longer than females ($\beta = .13$), even though females appear to have more parental involvement than males ($\beta = -.11$) and do better in school ($\beta = -.10$).

Home Rules (rules about maintaining a GPA, helping with housework, doing homework, watching TV, friends, etc.) did not influence students tenth grade school attendance. Previous achievement does significantly influence school attendance ($\beta = .28$). This finding is very important; students who are doing well in school will most likely stay in school. Therefore, students who are getting poor grades and who score low on standardized tests appear to be at-risk for dropping out of school by tenth grade. Also, students who do not appear to be doing well in school may have parents who are less involved in discussing school activities and who may have lower educational aspirations for them ($\beta = .35$).

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

These preliminary results appear very promising. Eighth grade MA students whose parents are involved in discussing school activities, have high educational aspirations for their children, and who have previously done well in school are not likely to drop out of school by tenth grade. However, male students may stay in school longer than female students, even though females may experience more parental involvement, and do better in school than males. This finding suggests further analysis is warranted to determine the role gender differences have in the MA family. It appears that home rules do not influence students school attendance, in fact, this variable could be deleted from the model. Interestingly, students of emigrant parents appear to do better in school and are more likely to still be in school in tenth grade than students whose parents were born in the United States. The influence of parental involvement on tenth grade high school drop out status has important educational and socioeconomic implications; by increasing parental involvement in eighth grade more MA students may stay in school and not become a drop out statistics.

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